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U.S. Lacks Information, Acts Warily

By John M. Goshko
and Don Oberdorfer
Washington Post Staff Writers

Senior administration officials, admitting that they still lack sufficient information to make "hard judgments" about the Polish crisis, said yesterday the United States will try to reserve its policy options toward Poland until the extent of repression, stability and Soviet involvement in the military crackdown there becomes clear.

Illustrative of this attempt to approach Poland with a cautious wait-and-see attitude were the remarks of Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr. after he arrived back in Washington from Brussels. He said U.S. food aid in the pipeline for Poland should be delivered on schedule. But he added that decisions on pending requests from the economically hard-pressed Polish authorities for new assistance will be held in abeyance.

Haig's comment was intended, in part, to clear up an apparent misunderstanding that occurred when Sen. Charles H. Percy (R-ILL), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, announced he had been told that shipments of U.S. food were being suspended. U.S. officials said Haig was anxious to point out that aid already agreed upon will continue and that there is no intention of taking punitive action against the Polish people.

This U.S. stance was described by a senior official aboard Haig's plane as trying to tread a fine line in actions and public comment on the Polish situation. The aim, the official stressed, is to avoid inciting violence that might lead to Soviet intervention, while at the same time not giving the impression of U.S. acquiescence in any repression of the Polish reform process.

According to other officials, that approach also was taken by President Reagan when he talked by telephone yesterday with Pope John Paul II. The officials said the Polish-born pontiff had asked that the United States continue its food aid to his country, and they added that the president promised to give the request serious consideration.

Following Haig's return, the president's key foreign policy advisers met for an hour at the White House last night under the chairmanship of Vice President Bush for the first full-scale review of the situation and an attempt to carve out the outlines of a policy for dealing with it.

Deputy White House press secretary Larry Speakes said Reagan would not take part in the meeting, which included all of his chief aides in the foreign policy, defense and economic areas. Instead, Speakes said, the gist of what was discussed at the meeting would be relayed to the president.

According to the senior official accompanying Haig, participants in the meeting will have to wrestle with two main questions: the extent to which the dissident trade union, Solidarity, and the Polish people will resist the crackdown, and whether the military's aim in assuming complete power is a temporary slowing down of the reform process or a permanent repression of it.

As of last night, the official conceded, none of this was clear. He said: "We really lack enough information to make any hard judgments . . . For this reason, our stance has been to avoid making hard decisions until more facts are known."

The official added, "In the hours, days and perhaps weeks ahead, we are best served by a careful monitoring and the avoidance of precipitous judgments, actions or statements."

In response to questions about whether the Soviets were involved directly or indirectly in the military takeover over the weekend, the official said western intelligence agencies had not reported any change from the situation on Sunday. At that time, Haig said there were no signs of direct Soviet involvement.

The official said the tools available to the United States and its allies in dealing with Poland are both diplomatic and economic. On the economic side, the question is whether the West will continue to provide food and financial support for that debt-ridden, increasingly destitute nation.

Although U.S. officials refused to discuss it yesterday, the administration on Friday decided to authorize \$100 million in new feed-grain credits for Poland and then suspended it after the military takeover.

Other officials said the aid question was among the subjects marked for intensive discussion at last night's White House meeting. The administration, they added, recognizes there is a potential problem in reconciling political decisions that might be made by the United States and its European allies with the economic interests of private banks, which hold \$16 billion of Poland's \$26 billion debt to the West.

Of this \$26 billion, approximately \$4 billion is accounted for by loans from the U.S. government and private American banks.

The official on Haig's plane said the Voice of America had been instructed, in its broadcasts to Poland, to emphasize "factual, objective reporting of the situation" and be careful not to give the impression that the United States is calling for violence or acquiescing in the crackdown.

After landing at Andrews Air Force Base, Haig said he thought the administration had received "a fair, acceptable level of intelligence" in terms of what the Polish armed forces might do. He added, however, that Washington, its allies and the leaders of Solidarity all were surprised by the military's decision to go ahead with a crackdown and by its timing.

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In addition to Bush and Haig, participants in the White House meeting last night were Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger, Treasury Secretary Donald T. Regan, acting national security adviser James Nance, Central Intelligence Agency Director William P. Casey, U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, Deputy Secretary of State William P. Clark, Deputy Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci, White House chief of staff James A. Baker III and deputy chief of staff Michael K. Deaver.